



A Partnership Between Faculty and Professional Staff

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I've written a lot about the faculty lunches because I wanted everyone to learn about the range of great work that is happening at the School. The only downside is that those posts have occupied nearly all of my blogging. There are lots of other things worth highlighting, and one of those is the excellent work of our professional staff. Let me offer this post as a first step in bringing greater balance to the story of the School's work.

I wrote in my last post about important work that Aimee Wall did on legislation that would have replaced county social services departments with a regional system. It didn't pass. Instead, the School was directed to convene a large working group that will make recommendations about regional supervision and collaboration. It is a big job and the legislature didn't appropriate nearly enough money to support the work.

How will Aimee manage to get the work done? As happens every day in different ways, our professional staff is coming to the rescue.



Pratibha Sirdeshmukh

Aimee had planned to hire one person to handle research and administrative support for the working group, but that didn't work out. Aimee contacted Linda Weiner about possible support, who put her in touch with Paula Cook. Paula talked with Pratibha Sirdeshmukh, who stepped up immediately to provide administrative support for Aimee and the working group. That will save money that Aimee can use for research, stakeholder facilitations, travel, and regional meeting spaces. The School's editorial and production staff will help with the two reports that the working group has been directed to produce. Facilities staff and others will support meetings held at Knapp-Sanders. Aimee will rely on the Business Office to handle reimbursement for meeting travel, contracts with outside facilitators, and other financial transactions. The working group may webcast its meetings, which means that Aimee will need support from the IT staff. None of the staff support time is covered by the General Assembly funding. Our professional staff is pitching in to make it work.

This one episode illustrates so many important lessons about the School. Our mission is to be as responsive as possible to the needs of the state, even when there isn't necessarily money to support the work.



Paula Cook

It also reflects a distinctive aspect of our culture. We have identified ourselves as one community—One School—that shares responsibility as colleagues for supporting our mission—regardless of one’s position in the organization. The School’s work involves delivering programs, services, and publications for public officials, a mission that is much broader and administratively more complex than the work of most academic units. Faculty members take the lead in making programmatic decisions. The active involvement and leadership of the School’s professional staff insures that the faculty’s work is implemented and delivered in ways that are as effective and efficient as possible.

From time to time we talk about our professional staff providing great “customer service” to our faculty and others who do faculty-like work. It is true in one sense—they do provide great service. Yet the language strikes me as wrong. Our professional staff are partners in carrying out the School’s mission—it is not a customer relationship. Faculty and staff have different roles, but they are professional colleagues who complement one another in meeting the needs of public officials. Neither can do it alone, and each needs to respect the talents, perspectives, and pressures faced by the other.



COLLABORATION CULTURE



I understand why we talk about customer service, and I think it applies when we are talking about meeting the needs of public officials. When it comes to supporting faculty members, however, it is a professional collaboration as colleagues. That might not be true in other departments—I honestly don't know, and it really doesn't matter. I do know that our work for North Carolina is better and stronger when we recognize—and celebrate—the partnership between faculty and our professional staff.

I am incredibly grateful for our wonderful and dedicated faculty who do such amazing work. I am equally grateful for our amazing professional staff, who routinely demonstrate their commitment and creativity in doing the impossible.